



*Boston Authors Club*

## February 2024 News

### ***In This Issue***

- **Member Spotlight: Sarah Whelan**
- **Reading Right now: Josh Funk**
- **BAC Events: Writing Together Online**
- **Yesteryear: Harry Koopman, Librarian's Librarian**



*Sarah Whelan is a full-time professional writer currently focused on fiction. She has published over a dozen nonfiction pieces in a variety of magazines and journals. Sarah's background includes a master's degree in criminal justice with twenty years of experience in the field. Her first novel, *The Struggle Within*, was published in 2018; the novel's prison setting draws on her criminal justice experience. *Humbug: Scrooge Before the Ghosts*, published in time for Christmas 2023, is her second novel. Sarah already has a new manuscript underway, with the working title *They Called Her Jack*. In this interview, she talks about her inspiration for *Humbug*, a back-to-front strategy for writing her work in progress, and some threads that connect her three novels.*

**Q: Congratulations on the 2023 publication of *Humbug : Scrooge Before the Ghosts*. Can you share your inspiration for this book and what you enjoyed most about reimagining *Scrooge*?**

A: Thank you, Mary! The novel has been well received with 23 reviews on Goodreads and 18 five-star ratings (to date) on Amazon. As far as inspiration, *Humbug: Scrooge Before the Ghosts* is a melding of two of my favorite things--everything Christmas and retellings of timeless tales, like *Song of Achilles*.

A *Christmas Carol* shows us one terrible day in Scrooge's life, but there is so much more to this scowling, penny-pinching man we think we know so well. I set out to explore the complexities of this character and discovered he is a doting uncle, beloved brother, successful businessman, and affectionate companion. A dark secret puts him and his loved ones at risk, and he struggles to embrace his true self in defiance of the Victorian era's repressive moral standards.

*Humbug* does not alter any facts or events that happened in Dickens' original story. Instead, it provides context, background, and consequences for them and offers insight into the motivations for Scrooge's actions. It will forever change the way we think about this character people love to

hate. It's time for the world to meet the real Ebenezer Scrooge!

**Q: It's exciting to hear that your third novel is already underway, with the working title *They Called Her Jack*. How is that work progressing?**

It was at a standstill until a few months ago. I knew exactly how I wanted the story to end, but I didn't know quite where to begin. Finally, I decided to write what I knew about my characters and their journey, starting at the end and working my way backward. The last chapter came rather easily, and then the second-to-last chapter, and then the second-to-second-last chapter, and so on. I've never written a novel out of order before and found it surprisingly fun—and energizing.

With the ending chapters in place, the beginning of the story was obvious. Who knew that would happen? Certainly not me! So now I'm on my way, with a prologue and chapters one through five drafted, in addition to the last four. I have about 12,000 words so far. There is much more work to come, but I'm excited to keep writing my way to the conclusion.

I envision this novel as a fictional retelling of the Jack the Ripper murders, centered on the actions of female characters and focused on the motive, not the mayhem of those historical events. I am using an unreliable narrator here, which is new for me, and I can't get enough of her!

**Q: Do you feel there are any threads connecting your first novel, *The Struggle Within*, with *Scrooge*, and with your next book?**

What an interesting question! I've never been asked that before. *The Struggle Within* and *Humbug: Scrooge Before the Ghosts* are very different novels, to be sure. The first was commercial fiction with lots of action and somewhat graphic descriptions of violence (it's about a prison riot, so I assume readers are expecting that), while *Humbug* is a historical novel written in Dickens' formal tone.

Upon reflection, I think *The Struggle Within* was the book I thought I should write (since I have a master's degree in criminology and had been developing that story and characters for over a decade). But *Humbug* is the book I wanted to write (see above – my love of Christmas and retellings).

My first novel taught me many lessons about writing, editing, and publishing, and I applied all of them to my second. I am proud of both books, but I think *Humbug: Scrooge Before the Ghosts* is a powerful, moving story, and I hope it finds its way into the hands of readers who appreciate it.

I'm sticking with the historical fiction genre for my third project—and the nineteenth-century London setting. Who knows where the fourth one will take me?

**Q: What events and book talks are you especially looking forward to over the next few months?**

Volunteering at the Boston Book Festival last year was truly one of the best experiences I've had as a reader and book lover. Unfortunately, the Connecticut Book Festival, which gives authors an opportunity to sell their books, is scheduled for the same day this year—Saturday, October 26! I've decided to attend the Connecticut event in 2024 to represent myself as a writer and promote **Humbug: Scrooge Before the Ghosts**. If you're in the area that day, stop by and visit me at the West Harford Convention Center.

**Q: Where can BAC members reach you?**

I'd love to connect with other authors and BAC members. You can reach me via my website <https://sarahwhelanwriter.com/> and Instagram/Facebook @sarahwhelanauthor.

*Interview by Mary J Cronin*



**Josh Funk is a software engineer and the author of books like the *Lady Pancake & Sir French Toast* series, *How to Code a Sandcastle*, *Dear Unicorn*, *Dear Dragon*, *My Pet Feet*, the *It's Not a Fairy Tale* series, *Lost in***



*the Library, and more.*

**For more information about Josh, all his books, upcoming talks, (and more humorous versions of his biography), visit him at [joshfunkbooks.com](http://joshfunkbooks.com) and on social media at [@joshfunkbooks](https://twitter.com/joshfunkbooks).**

**Given his prolific publishing record, it's no surprise that Josh doesn't limit himself to reading just one book at a time. Here's his take on our Reading Right Now questions:**

**Q: What book are you reading right now?**

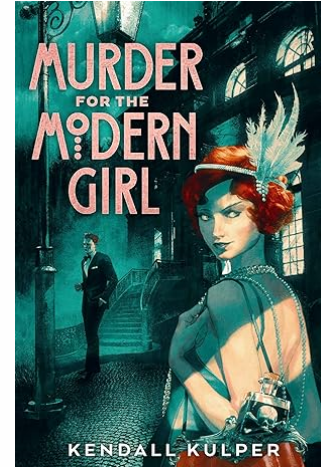
While I'm technically in the middle of reading three books (one for myself, one aloud with my wife, and one audiobook), I'll focus on the audiobook version of *Murder for the Modern Girl* by Kendall Kulper. It's a big genre mashup that can best be described (at least by me) a Gatsby-era, historical fiction, murder mystery(ish), serial killer, legal, political, medical, romance, young adult novel told from the perspective of two 18-year-olds. Oh, it's also got hints of an X-Men origin story (not in the 'hero' sense, but in that the two main characters each have 'special powers') - so I guess you could add fantasy to that list, too? And none of that even spoils anything.

**Q: What motivated you to pick up this title?**

But I didn't know any of that when I picked it up. I chose it because it was recommended to me by my own 18-year-old, who knows that one of my favorite genres is "Murder Mystery." They said I really should read it, and that's all it took; a recommendation from a trusted source.

**Q: Would you recommend it to your friends? Why or why not?**

Would I recommend it to my friends? Yes. No question. And frankly, the fact that the characters are only 18 years old makes no difference. This easily could have been pitched as an adult book. It was thoroughly enjoyable (although I'm only 2/3 of the way through, so the ending could be disappointing; I haven't gotten there yet. If it continues at this pace, I'd give it a 4.75 on Storygraph (my Goodreads alternative app) - and I've never given anything a 5 yet.



## YOU ARE INVITED!

### BAC Writing Together Online Sessions

As we all know, writing can often be a lonely experience. Come join the BAC Writing Together Online Sessions launching on Zoom on Thursday, February 8, from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m.

A second session will be held on Tuesday, February 13, from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. These writing sessions will create a community of writers who connect, set realistic goals, and write together to motivate one another. Note that it is not a workshop group! We will speak briefly at the start and again at the end of each session but will spend the time writing with our cameras off.

If you're interested in joining us, please email Tracy Geary at [tgeary@alumni.harvard.edu](mailto:tgeary@alumni.harvard.edu), and she will send you the Zoom meeting link. We look forward to seeing you!

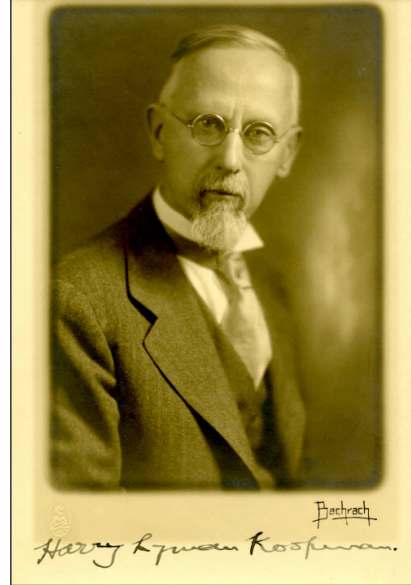
## Yesteryear: Harry Koopman, Librarian's Librarian

**Harry Lyman Koopman (1860-1937) joined the Boston Authors Club in 1909. At the time, he was the Brown University librarian, a position he held from 1893 until he retired in 1930. Before accepting the head position at Brown, Koopman worked at the Astor Library in Manhattan and was a cataloger in the libraries of Cornell, Columbia, Rutgers, and the University of**

**Vermont. During his 37-year tenure at Brown, he presided over the growth of the collection from 80,000 volumes to 400,000 volumes and the construction of the John Hay Library of rare books and special collections.**

Koopman was a librarian's librarian in the tradition of Charles Ammi Cutter and William Frederick Poole. But where Cutter and Poole tended to the science of the library --- its organization and administration --- Koopman tended to its humanist aspects, especially the nurturing of readers and the caring of books.

The readers with whom Koopman was primarily concerned were university students. Likewise, the books with which he was primarily concerned were books in a university library. As a university librarian, he believed that introducing members of these two cultures to each other was an important duty. His *The Mastery of Books; Hints on Reading and the Use of Libraries*, published in 1896 by the American Library Association, familiarizes students with university library books, and his *The Booklover and His Books*, published in 1917 by the Boston Book Company, familiarizes the books with the students.



Universities have always had libraries, of course, but the practice of tightly coupling the university library collection to the educational mission of the university itself is, in Koopman's telling, as recent as the late nineteenth century. In the chapter "The Place of the Library in Education" in *Mastery of Books*, Koopman attributes this conjunction to three factors: 1) the university extension movement started at Johns Hopkins in 1876, 2) the pivot of the Chautauqua movement to secular studies which happened at about the same time, and 3) the introduction of the seminary method in the university itself. Along the way, he notes that public libraries were not immune to these influences, opening rooms for classwork and purchasing books to support summer schools, correspondence schools, and bureau courses. It was the linkage of university and public libraries to education that introduced the student to the book.

It is in *Booklover* that Koopman introduces the book to the student. He doesn't want students to be just book readers. He wants them to be book lovers. He writes:

*"The booklover is distinguished from the reader as such by loving his books and from the collector as such by reading them. He prizes not only the soul of the book but also its body, which he would make the house beautiful, [meant] for the indwelling of the spirit given by its author."*

*Booklover* is addressed to the publisher, printer, and binder and yet equally well to the student reader in that it educates the reader regarding the aspects and aesthetics of book creation. Koopman brings into being the notion of a *book being beautiful*, a notion that is used through *Booklover*. Regarding the publisher, the book Beautiful must be fit, which means to Koopman that it "must be adapted to the literature it contains." Regarding the printer and the binder, the book must be well-made, which means it is "legible, strong, and durable." In the chapter "Books as a Librarian Would Like Them," Koopman catalogs in detail the properties of a book that make it acceptable to a university librarian.

Koopman is a gifted author. There are numerous turns of phrase in both *Mastery* and *Booklover* that one pauses to cherish. In addition to these two books, he wrote novels, poetry, and plays. He was a president of the American Library Association, and some of his assistants went on to be librarians at first-tier libraries. One of these students, Philip D. Sherman, donated a collection of over 5,000 first editions and rare books to Brown in honor of Koopman. It is known as the Harry Lyman Koopman Collection. An exhibit of Koopman's contribution to the Brown Library called Leaves of an Hour is described [here](#).

**By Scott Guthery**

**authors!**  
**AUTHORS!**

***The BAC newsletter is published the first week of every month except for the summer months. Please send news about your upcoming events, awards, and new books to [bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com](mailto:bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com) by February 26 for publication in the March edition.***

***Members are reminded that they are welcome to add an author profile to the [Boston Authors Club Gallery](#). This is an opportunity to promote your books and refer visitors to your website and your social media presence.***

---

## Your BAC Membership for 2024

***BAC membership dues are \$50 for the calendar year. You can join or renew online by [clicking here](#). If you would rather pay by check, please make your check out to the Boston Authors Club and mail it to the following address:***

**Nancy Tupper Ling  
Boston Authors Club  
1600 Providence Highway #247  
Walpole MA 02081**

---

| BOSTON AUTHORS CLUB | [bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com](mailto:bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com) |

STAY CONNECTED



*Boston Authors Club*

Boston Authors Club | 109 Conant Road, Lincoln, MA 01773

[Unsubscribe bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com](mailto:bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com)

[Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by [bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com](mailto:bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com) powered by



Try email marketing for free today!